United Nations A/61/499

General Assembly

Distr.: General
6 October 2006

Original: English

Sixty-first session
Agenda item 121
Pattern of conferences

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Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/61/129). In the course of its review of the report, the Advisory Committee also took into account the information contained in the report on the impact of the capital master plan on meetings to be held at Headquarters during its implementation (A/61/300). During its consideration of the report, the Advisory Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information and clarifications.

2. The report on the pattern of conferences covers matters related to integrated global management, meetings management, proactive document management, translation and interpretation. The Secretary-General puts forward a number of proposals on the servicing of meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States, timely submission of documents, control and limitation of documentation, dynamic prioritization of document processing, training of language staff and improvement in the quality of the language services.

3. The Committee notes from paragraph 2 of the report that progress has been made in the project on integrated global management of conference services. The main goal of integrated global management is harmonizing/standardizing business processes across duty stations for the purposes of streamlining and optimizing operations, better sharing of resources and workload and achieving economies of scale. As indicated in the report, common approaches to administrative policies, practices and procedures were identified and harmonized/standardized in a cooperative venture involving the four duty stations of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management at New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi.

4. The Committee observes from the report of the Secretary-General that at the Seventh Coordination Meeting of Conference Managers, held at Vienna in June 2006, new agreement was reached in such areas as the following: (a) proactive document management; (b) capacity calculations; (c) a common terminology

06-55852 (E) 101006

database for language staff, and (d) computer-assisted translation. The four duty stations agreed to encourage the use of computer-assisted translation (CAT) and to increase the proportion of documents translated with such technology. Each duty station would identify both the documents of a repetitive nature that would lend themselves to being processed with CAT and the staff who would work with CAT tools. The duty stations agreed to hold a full exchange of practices at the eighth coordination meeting of conference managers. **The Committee notes the position taken at the Seventh Coordination Meeting of Conference Managers and encourages further efforts aimed at enhancing the coordinated approach to conference servicing, while emphasizing the need for quality and consistency in all official languages.**

5. As indicated in paragraph 10 of the report, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management launched an information technology global initiative, in line with earlier recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Office of Internal Oversight Services. The Committee notes that outside consultants were engaged to undertake a comprehensive review of both business processes and information technology applications, with a view to streamlining processes and improving standardization and integration across the four duty stations at New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi. As a result of the study, the Department has established an information technology governance board, with the participation of information technology and programme focal points from all four duty stations. The board is designed to ensure consistency, guard against redundancy and duplication of effort and ensure cost-effectiveness in the use of resources. The Committee was informed that one of the key functions of the board is to ensure that all major information technology initiatives are in line with the Secretariat's information technology strategies and policies and that the Information Technology Services Division will have a representative serving on the board in an ex officio capacity. The Committee was also informed that the board would hold its first meeting at the beginning of October 2006. The Committee intends to revert to the matter when it takes up the report of the Secretary-General on information and communication technology.

6. With regard to the utilization of conference-servicing resources, the Committee notes that progress has been made in calendar management by spreading out meeting days and reducing peaks and valleys that prove wasteful. As indicated in paragraph 15 of the Secretary-General's report (see A/61/129), at 85 per cent in 2005, the overall utilization factor was 2 per cent higher than in 2004 and 8 per cent higher as compared to 2003. The Committee observes that the increase in overall utilization was due solely to the improvement of utilization in New York, where there was an increase in the number of meetings programmed and held and a more efficient reassignment of services from cancelled meetings compared with the previous year. Annex I to the report provides a detailed breakdown by body of the utilization statistics and identifies components that have an impact on the utilization factor. In that regard the Committee notes from paragraph 16 of the same report that the time utilized for informal meetings or consultations held before the start, after the adjournment of or instead of the officially scheduled meetings, when utilizing the same services and with due notification given to the Secretariat, is not recorded as time lost. **The Committee is of the view that a precise identification of what constitutes the time lost for conference-servicing is very important for proper**

calculation of the utilization factor; a detailed explanation should be provided of all factors contributing to a loss of time for conference-servicing.

7. The Committee observes that with respect to utilization of the Economic Commission for Africa conference centre at Addis Ababa, a number of events previously booked in 2005 were cancelled, which brought down the utilization rate. The Committee was informed that while the Commission had been using a different methodology in the calculation of utilization rates of its conference facilities, the application of the harmonized statistical standards on meetings used by other conference servicing duty stations for the period from January to June 2006 had brought the utilization rate to 67.9 per cent, as opposed to the 31 per cent calculated on the basis of previous methodology.

8. In response to the General Assembly's request to explore innovative ways of servicing meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States, the Secretary-General has put forward two options in his report. The first option (see A/61/129, para. 30) would lead to greater availability, with no additional budgetary requirements. The services for regional groups would still not be guaranteed since the legislative authority would not change. The second option (see para. 31) would guarantee services for regional group meetings since dedicated resources would be allocated. Although no indication is given at this stage of the magnitude of dedicated resources required, the Secretary-General indicates that the second option would entail significant additional resources.

9. Annex IV to the Secretary-General's report contains statistics on document management. As indicated in paragraph 46 of that report, after years of strict enforcement and the gradual coming on board of the author departments, the timeliness of submissions has improved steadily, although the overall level still shows room for improvement. The Committee notes that some author departments tend to show low compliance with the timely issuance of documents. The Committee was informed that the timely submission of reports had been included as a performance indicator in the Secretary-General's annual compact with the heads of all departments and that the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management had recommended that the Secretary-General include the timely submission of mandated documents as a performance indicator of author departments in the biennial programme performance report. **The Committee is of the view that the timely submission of documents should also be included in the proposed programme budget as a performance indicator for author departments.**

10. The Committee recalls its previous recommendation that the document slotting system must have some flexibility built into it, in order to function effectively (see A/60/433, para. 31). The Secretariat reports that the Department introduced flexibility into the slotting system where practical, particularly in discussions with author departments that have been granted a later submission deadline. The Committee was informed that the Department initiated a self-evaluation exercise on the slotting system with the assistance of the Office of Internal Oversight Services and with the participation of author departments.

11. The Committee observes that the capacity of the Organization to print documents using its own facilities was not included in the analysis of the status of document management. The Committee attaches a great deal of importance to this issue as having a significant impact on the ability of the Secretariat to produce

documents in a timely fashion. Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that the printing capacity would be reviewed. **The Committee requests therefore that analysis of printing capacity of the Organization be included in future reports on conference servicing in general and on document management in particular.**

12. In paragraphs 62 to 67 of his report (A/61/129), the Secretary-General outlines the measures undertaken by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management to enhance transparency and accountability as concerns the timely issuance of mandated documents. The Committee welcomes the conclusion stated in paragraph 66 of the report that at this stage, transparency and accountability are firmly in place within the Department and that with the introduction of the accountability mechanism, as recommended by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, there is expected to be greater transparency and accountability throughout the Secretariat.

13. The Committee takes note of the views expressed in paragraphs 68 and 69 of the report that the existing workload standards for specific categories of conference-servicing staff "are a rather crude, one-dimensional measure of performance, focusing on quantity of output alone at the level of individual staff members" and that "there is clearly a need to supplement these standards with more meaningful and multidimensional measures of performance, such as timeliness of delivery and quality of services". **The Committee remains concerned that the Secretary-General has not yet implemented the request of the General Assembly with regard to the development of quantitative methods and indicators to assess productivity, efficiency and cost-effectiveness. The Committee welcomes the intention of the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly on a regular basis, beginning in 2007, an additional array of performance indicators, including timeliness, quality, financial performance and client satisfaction, which would shift the emphasis to broader, higher-level metrics of full-system performance and would allow more timely and targeted action to be taken in response to any weaknesses detected. The Committee trusts that this will represent a concrete step in responding to the General Assembly request contained in section II.B, paragraph 10, of resolution 58/250.**

14. The Committee discussed with the Department the issue of forthcoming retirements and succession planning in the language services. As indicated in paragraph 83 of the report, 20 per cent of all language staff at Headquarters will retire between 2006 and 2011. The Committee was provided upon request with detailed statistics on projected retirements in the Department for the period until December 2011 (see annex I below).

15. The Committee was informed that despite various efforts made to fill vacant language posts in Nairobi, in particular in the Arabic interpretation booth, there were no desired results. The Secretariat provided upon request, detailed information on the vacancy situation in the language services at Headquarters in New York, the United Nations Office at Geneva, the United Nations Office at Vienna and the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON) (see annex II below), which shows that the vacancy rate in the Arabic interpretation booth at UNON was 50 per cent as at 31 August 2006. **The Committee reiterates therefore its previous recommendation whereby it encouraged the Department to further intensify efforts to improve the vacancy situation in the conference services of the United Nations Office at Nairobi and, in the light of the prolonged vacancy situation, the Committee urged the Department to consider all possible approaches (see A/60/433, para. 8).**

16. Furthermore, the Committee notes from paragraph 83 of the Secretary-General's report that there has been a decline in the number of applicants for United Nations language examinations in recent years, as the language professions in the United Nations seem to be losing their appeal; fewer universities are offering courses relevant to the work of the United Nations, and fewer students are studying languages in the countries where some of the United Nations official languages are used, portending a shrinking pool of skilled linguists in the near future. **The Committee sees merit in the Secretariat's intention to participate, where appropriate, and in cooperation with other international organizations, in outreach activities targeting universities that train language professionals in order to make them aware of the staffing needs of the international organizations (see A/61/129, para. 86). At the same time the Committee believes that the Organization should try to expedite the timely replacement of retired language staff, expand the recruitment base of linguists and enhance staff training programmes. The Committee is of the view that urgent measures need to be worked out to adequately meet the current and forthcoming challenges of the Organization resulting from a shortage of qualified language specialists.**

Annex I

Projected retirements in conference services, July 2006-December 2011

A. Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, New York

	Jul.-Dec. 2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
Interpreters							
Office of the Chief	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Arabic	0	1	0	0	2	1	4
Chinese	0	1	1	0	1	0	3
English	0	1	0	2	0	0	3
French	0	1	4	1	0	0	6
Russian	0	0	0	2	1	2	5
Spanish	0	0	2	1	0	2	5
Subtotal	**0**	**5**	**7**	**6**	**4**	**5**	**27**
Translators/Revisers							
Arabic	0	1	2	3	1	2	11
Chinese	1	3	2	6	3	0	15
English	0	2	3	1	0	3	9
French	2	3	3	2	1	1	12
Russian	1	0	2	3	2	3	11
Spanish	1	0	0	0	2	1	4
Subtotal	**5**	**11**	**12**	**15**	**9**	**10**	**62**
Verbatim Reporters							
Arabic	0	1	1	0	1	1	4
Chinese	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
English	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
French	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Russian	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Spanish	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Subtotal	**0**	**1**	**2**	**1**	**2**	**2**	**8**
Text Processors							
Arabic	6	3	1	1	1	2	14
Chinese	2	2	1	1	1	1	8
English	1	1	0	0	2	3	7
French	0	1	1	1	2	0	5
Russian	2	0	1	0	1	0	4
Spanish	0	4	2	0	2	1	9
Subtotal	**11**	**11**	**6**	**3**	**9**	**7**	**47**

	Jan.–Dec. 2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
Editors							
All	0	2	2	2	3	1	10
Subtotal	**0**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**3**	**1**	**10**
Total	**16**	**30**	**29**	**27**	**27**	**25**	**154**

B. Conference Services Division, Geneva

	Jan.–Dec. 2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
Interpreters							
Office of the Chief	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Arabic	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Chinese	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
English	0	0	0	2	0	1	3
French	1	1	0	2	0	1	5
Russian	0	0	1	1	1	0	3
Spanish	2	0	0	0	1	1	4
Subtotal	**4**	**4**	**1**	**6**	**2**	**5**	**22**
Translators/Revisers							
Arabic	0	2	2	1	2	1	8
Chinese	0	0	0	0	0	4	4
English	0	0	3	0	1	1	5
French	1	0	3	1	2	2	9
Russian	0	0	1	0	1	1	3
Spanish	0	1	1	3	0	0	5
Subtotal	**1**	**3**	**10**	**5**	**6**	**11**	**36**
Text Processors							
Arabic	1	1	0	2	2	0	6
Chinese	1	2	0	0	0	0	3
English	0	2	0	0	4	2	8
French	1	1	4	0	1	2	9
Russian	0	1	2	2	2	3	10
Spanish	2	1	0	0	1	0	4
Subtotal	**5**	**8**	**6**	**4**	**10**	**7**	**40**
Editors							
All	0	1	1	1	2	1	6
Subtotal	**0**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**2**	**1**	**6**
Total	**10**	**16**	**18**	**16**	**20**	**24**	**104**

C. Conference Management Service, Vienna

Interpreters							
Office of the Chief	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Arabic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chinese	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
English	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
French	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Russian	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spanish	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Subtotal	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Translators/Revisers							
Arabic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chinese	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
English	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
French	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Russian	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spanish	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Subtotal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Text Processors							
Arabic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chinese	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
English	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
French	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Russian	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spanish	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Subtotal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Editors							
All	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Subtotal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	1	0	0	0	0	1

D. Division of Conference Services, Nairobi

	Ads./Dec.	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
Interpreters								
Office of the Chief		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Arabic		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chinese		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
English		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
French		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Russian		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spanish		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Subtotal		**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Translators/Revisers								
Arabic		0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Chinese		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
English		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
French		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Russian		0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Spanish		0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Subtotal		**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**3**	**3**
Text Processors								
Arabic		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chinese		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
English		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
French		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Russian		0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Spanish		0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Subtotal		**0**	**0**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**1**	**2**
Editors								
All								
Subtotal		**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Total		**0**	**0**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**4**	**5**

Annex II

Vacancy situation in conference services as at 31 August 2006

A. Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, New York

Interpretation Service: Professional posts

Section	Established posts	Posts encumbered	Posts vacant	Vacancy rate (%)
Arabic	27	22	5	18.5
Chinese	26	26	0	0.0
English	19	15	4	21.1
French	19	17	2	10.5
Russian	19	17	1	5.6
Spanish	19	18	1	5.3
Total	**129**	**115**	**13**	**10.2**

Translation Services: Professional posts

Section	Established posts	Posts encumbered	Posts vacant	Vacancy rate (%)
Arabic	59	47	12	20.3
Chinese	59	56	3	5.1
English	23	20	3	13.0
French	57	44	13	22.8
Russian	54	44	10	18.5
Spanish	54	45	9	16.7
Total	**306**	**256**	**50**	**16.3**

Text Processing Section: General Service posts

Section	Established posts	Posts encumbered	Posts vacant	Vacancy rate (%)
Arabic	35	31	4	11.4
Chinese	34	33	1	2.9
English	32	32	0	0.0
French	34	34	0	0.0
Russian	35	34	1	2.9
Spanish	35	33	2	5.7
Total	**205**	**197**	**8**	**3.9**

B. Conference Management Services Division, Geneva

Interpretation Service: Professional posts

Section	*Ideal post scenario*	*Posts encumbered*	*Posts vacant*	*Vacancy rate (%)*
Arabic	14	12	2	14.3
Chinese	14	14	0	0.0
English	16	15	1	6.3
French	16	15	1	6.3
Russian	13	13	0	0.0
Spanish	10	9	1	10.0
Total	**83**	**78**	**5**	**6.0**

Translation Services: Professional posts

Section	*Established posts*	*Posts encumbered*	*Posts vacant*	*Vacancy rate (%)*
Arabic	23	21	2	8.7
Chinese	20	18	4	20.0
English	15	11	4	26.7
French	35	34	1	2.9
Russian	35	33	2	5.7
Spanish	25	24	1	4.0
Total	**153**	**141**	**14**	**9.2**

Text Processing Section: General Service posts

Section	*Established posts*	*Posts encumbered*	*Posts vacant*	*Vacancy rate (%)*
Arabic	15	15	0	0.0
Chinese	13	12	1	7.7
English	21	21	0	0.0
French	26	24	2	7.7
Russian	27	27	0	0.0
Spanish	20	17	3	15.0
Total	**122**	**116**	**6**	**4.9**

C. Conference Management Service, Vienna

Interpretation Section: Professional posts

Section	*Ideal post scenario*	*Posts encumbered*	*Posts vacant*	*Vacancy rate (%)*
Arabic	4	3	1	25.0
Chinese	4	4	0	0.0
English	3	2	1	33.3
French	3	3	0	0.0
Russian	3	2	1	33.3
Spanish	3	2	1	33.3
Total	**20**	**16**	**4**	**20.0**

Translation Section: Professional posts

Service	*Established posts*	*Posts encumbered*	*Posts vacant*	*Vacancy rate (%)*
Arabic	6	5	1	16.7
Chinese	6	5	1	16.7
English	3	1	2	66.7
French	9	7	2	22.2
Russian	6	5	1	16.7
Spanish	8	8	0	0.0
Total	**38**	**31**	**7**	**18.4**

Text Processing Section: General Service posts

Section	*Established posts*	*Posts encumbered*	*Posts vacant*	*Vacancy rate (%)*
Arabic	4	4	0	0.0
Chinese	3	3	0	0.0
English	4	4	0	0.0
French	7	7	0	0.0
Russian	5	5	0	0.0
Spanish	7	7	0	0.0
Total	**30**	**30**	**0**	0.0

[*] The post of the Section Chief has not been included in the table but was encumbered.

D. Division of Conference Services, Nairobi

Interpretation units: Professional posts

Unit	*Ideal post scenario*	*Posts encumbered*	*Posts vacant*	*Vacancy rate (%)*
Arabic	4	2	2	50.0
Chinese	4	3	1	25.0
English	3	3	0	0.0
French	3	2	1	33.3
Russian	3	2	1	33.3
Spanish	3	2	1	33.3
Total	**20**	**14**	**6**	**30.0**

Translation and Editorial Section: Professional posts

Unit	*Established posts*	*Posts encumbered*	*Posts vacant*	*Vacancy rate (%)*
Arabic	3	1	2	66.7
Chinese	3	3	0	0.0
English	5	4	1	20.0
French	4	4	0	0.0
Russian	3	2	1	33.3
Spanish	4	3	1	25.0
Total	**22**	**17**	**5**	**22.7**

Text Processing Section: General Service posts

Section	*Established posts*	*Posts encumbered*	*Posts vacant*	*Vacancy rate (%)*
Arabic	4	4	0	0.0
Chinese	4	4	0	0.0
English	3	3	0	0.0
French	5	5	0	0.0
Russian	3	3	0	0.0
Spanish	3	3	0	0.0
Total	**22**	**22**	**0**	**0.0**